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**Viṣṇu As a Hunter:
Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās on Hunting Procession/Festival***

SUMMARY: The paper examines Pāñcarātra prescriptions pertaining to a hunting procession/festival (*mṛgayātrā/mṛgayotsava*), chiefly as held on two main occasions: on the 8th day of *mahotsava* and on the *vīralakṣmyutsava*, the latter corresponding with *vijayadaśamī* which concludes *mahānavamī/navarātri*. Through equating the god with a hunter, a ritual hunt displays strong associations with royal power. However, these two occasions of sending the deity for hunting seem to deal with different models of a ruler and his relation to his realm: a ruler who enjoys it (as in terms of a hunting game in a garden) and a ruler who subjugates it (as in terms of new territories traversed while hunting in a forest). As I argue, a key issue in discerning those models appears to be an event of crossing the border of a domesticated space, which also makes the presence of Viṣṇu's wives on his side impossible.

KEYWORDS: Pāñcarātra, *mṛgayotsava*, *mṛgayātrā*, royal hunt, Vīralakṣmī, *mahotsava*

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Accounts of a hunting procession/festival (Sanskrit: *mṛgayātrā/mṛgayotsava*)¹ have not drawn much interest of scholars working on South Indian Vaiṣṇava prescriptive literature. If treated, the main concern seems to be the inhomogeneity of *mṛgayotsava* related passages, interpreted as possibly the outcome of regional influences upon rather minor celebrations, or their later addition to the bulk of a given text suggested by various deviations from the festival's general pattern, discernible in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva ritual treatises (Colas 1996: 326–327).² However, as Daniel H. Smith has noticed, a number of passages devoted to this subject in several Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās* gives the impression that a ritual hunt—in inscriptional evidence from medieval Tamil Nadu the most often mentioned instance of taking a deity beyond the temple besides a trip to receive a ritual bath (*tīrtha*) (Orr 2004: 450)—has had particular significance in the liturgical year of Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra shrines (Smith 1982: 32).

Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās* indicate two basic occasions on which a hunting procession/festival should be held: as a constituent of a great annual festival (*mahotsava/brahmotsava/śraddhotsava*) usually performed on its eighth day; and as related to the festival of Hero-Lakṣmī (*vīralakṣmyutsava*) which comes immediately after the nine-day observances (*navāha*) dedicated to the Goddess and scheduled for September–October.³ In addition, in some instances *saṃhitās* speak

¹ In Gérard Colas' translation: "hunting procession" (*mṛgayotsava*) or "expedition for (hunting) wild beasts" (*mṛgayātrā*) (Colas 2010: 165).

² From the perspective of Vaikhanāsa sources a *mṛgayātrā/mṛgayotsava* is briefly discussed by Jan Gonda (Gonda 1969: 252–253) and Gérard Colas (Colas 1996: 324–327). Some hints concerning Pāñcarātra point of view are given by Leslie C. Orr in her paper concerning a changing pattern of South Indian processions (Orr 2004), by S. A. S. Sarma in the paper on a royal hunt in Kerala, based chiefly on vernacular manuals but also richly drawing on Śaiva *āgamas* (Sarma 2014), and by Ute Hüsken (Hüsken 2018), who combines philological and ethnographic methods to focus on a current practice of Varadarāja Temple in Kanchipuram.

³ These two instances of performing a ritual hunt, that is the eighth day of *mahotsava* and *mahānavamī/navarātri* are also common for South Indian Śaiva and Śakta traditions, see for instance L'Hernault 1984.

about hunt festivities held independently, either in January or August–September (cf. Smith 1982: 35). Whatever the occasion, it is recommended to mount a deity’s processional idol in an outfit proper for hunting upon a “kingly” vehicle (usually a horse, rarely an elephant). Surrounded by devotees, some of them holding weapons so that they epitomize hunters, the deity is carried outside the premises of the temple. However, the prescriptions vary in several points, for instance with regard to the presence of Viṣṇu’s consorts, Śrī and Bhūmi, during the trip; the involvement of rituals related to a *vahni/śamī* tree; chasing wild animals (presumably performed); and the procession’s destination (a garden or a forest), or, in other words, a route covered by the procession.

This, at least in some cases, detectable lack of uniformity may be, as suggested by Colas in reference to Vaikhānasa sources, a side-product of the Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*’ multidimensional textual reworking, the phenomenon which, additionally, makes the exact dating of the texts impossible (Rastelli 2019: 167). Nonetheless, it seems worth the attempt to examine whether the *mṛgayotsava* concept as presented in the Pāñcarātra corpus reveals any trace of its coherent development, for instance, in terms of logic behind establishing various occasions of the hunt’s performance. This issue involves a series of complementary questions which have not been discussed so far from the perspective of Pāñcarātra prescriptions. Is the procession’s destination—a garden or a forest—meaningful and thus somehow impacts the festival’s structure and the functions/tasks of its participants? Putting it differently, what about *mṛgayotsava*’s territorial aspect, which as shown by Orr in her study based on inscriptions from the Tamil area issued during 9–14th century—that is the period roughly overlapping with the composition of South Indian Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*—is closely related to the notion of demonstrating and negotiating royal power (Orr 2004: 443)? In Orr’s view, pieces of information on the god’s hunt which occur in inscriptional evidence since the times of the Cōḷa reign present a rather consistent picture of *mṛgayotsava* irrespective of a regional or sectarian context. This particular period falls

in-between the times which present a contrasting image of processions: between the period of Tamil Ālvārs (6th–9th cent.), in whose poems the god is confined to his territory and thus these are rather worshippers who approach him, and the ‘modern’ period of the last six hundred years, during which the movement took an opposite direction. In the latter case, a deity leaves the temple, including a hunt excursion, not only for the sake of becoming accessible to all, but also to mark his territory. Since then, mostly from the Vijayanagara period onwards, the outward movement became “expressive of—and constitutive of—sovereignty over the god’s realm, the recognition and incorporation of people of various castes and neighbourhoods as subjects of the Lord” (Orr 2004: 441–442).

And remarkably, in a current practice of South Indian temples this is Ahobilam, a rather peripheral Śrīvaiṣṇava centre of the Narasimha cult adhering to the Pāñcarātra mode of worship, which hosts the most spectacular celebrations of a ritual hunt in South India. Being scheduled for the mid-January (procession starts on the day following the *makarasamkrānti*) it corresponds with celebrations which in prescriptive literature are disconnected both from the *mahotsava* and *vīralakṣmyutsava*.⁴ Although alluded to quite early by Tirumaṅgai Ālvār (8th/9th cent.), the site significantly developed not earlier than under the Vijayanagara rulers’ patronage, when the Śrīvaiṣṇava *maṭha* was established there. Differently than in other South Indian temples which schedule a ritual hunt for 1 or 2 days, here within 40 days the procession visits 33 sites, some of them situated many kilometres from Ahobilam itself (Vasanth 2001: 143–144).

The relevant portions of *saṃhitās* do not mention explicitly the figure of a king in the sense of an earthly ruler as the agent of rituals prescribed for *mrgayotsava*. Nonetheless, the festival’s relation to the royal power seems crucial notwithstanding the occasion of its performance.

⁴ Besides, in a much less spectacular way a ritual hunt is celebrated in Ahobilam within the framework of *mahānavamī/navarātri* on the evening of *vijaya-daśamī* (September–October).

From the Cōḷa times onwards in South Indian temple traditions a deity has been perceived as a “paradigmatic sovereign”, who “is first in rank, who commands resources, and who is generous in ensuring prosperity for the kingdom” (Appadurai, Appadurai Breckenridge 1976: 190). Both a king and a deity dwell in a temple-palace (Tam. *kōyil*), share ritual paraphernalia (stylus, drum, elephant, etc.) which are used during processions around the subjugated area, maintain a retinue which constitutes a royal court, etc. (ibid.) In the case of *mṛgayotsava*, this connection is particularly enhanced for the motif of hunting, common for Indian narratives, always alludes to a chase as a king’s favourite pastime. Certain relatively late texts which discuss *rājadharmā* go as far as stating that hunting is not only a kingly sport but also a ruler’s duty: killing ferocious animals brings merits and gives an opportunity of inspecting forest and protecting crops (Sudyka 2019: 277–278).

In line with Orr’s observations concerning the importance of Vijayanagara policy for changing the pattern of South Indian processions, identifying a hunting god with a king was especially important for the poets of Vijayanagara kings, whose task was to praise their rulers, often through equating them with gods to symbolically expand their sphere of influence, for example, into a wild forest area (Sudyka 2019: 279–280). It seems that in this connection *mṛgayotsava* is described in detail in the *Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū* of Ahobala (ca. 15th cent.) (Anderson 1992, Sudyka 2019). The king’s hunting is also the background of a less known drama *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* attributed to the 7th *jīyar* (pontiff) of the Ahobilam *maṭha*, Śaṭakopaṇ Yātindra Mahādeśika (ca 16th cent.) (Dębicka-Borek 2016). Both works relate the royal chase to celebrations of an annual *vasantotsava* (Spring Festival) and reveal particular regional and sectarian traits. Whereas the hero of the former one, set in Hampi, is Śiva as Gaṅgadhāra and the lord of Hemakūta, who in the garb of a hunter rides a horse to a forest beyond the Tuṅgabhadrā river to romance celestial ladies, the latter uses the motif to depict the circumstances of encounter between Narasiṃha identified with the Lord of Ahobilam, with a tribal girl, whom he meets on his expedition to the woods surrounding the site.

In addition, the theme of a hunt—in terms of a kingly obligation and, more symbolically, as a part of *vijayadaśamī* festivities aimed at celebrating a Goddess's victory over a demon—occurs in the *Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* (16th cent.), a tantric work focused on the Goddess Sāmrajyalakṣmī, written for the use of a Vijayanagara king (Sarangi 1993).

In the following pages I shall discuss distinct occasions of performing Viṣṇu's hunt as prescribed by the Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*. The analysis, as we will see, leads to the conclusion that one of the most important factors influencing the pattern of Viṣṇu's hunting procession is connected to its spatial aspect, for it is the moment of transgressing the boundary of domesticated area and entering the forest.

Viṣṇu's hunt on the occasion of *mahotsava*

Most frequently the *saṃhitās* contextualize a god's hunting expedition within the framework of the Great Festival (*mahotsava*), which usually lasts 9 or 10 days.⁵ Considered the most important temple festival that marks the star-day of the idol, commemorates the date of the temple's consecration etc., *mahotsava* is usually held once a year (with no fixed date among the temples). Very important are daily processions, with the most spectacular *rathotsava* ('car-festival'), during which a festival image of a deity is paraded through the streets on various vehicles (*vāhana*) (Smith 1982: 30) seemingly expressing the deity's various aspects (Wessels-Mevissen 2011: 572). Quite commonly for both South Indian prescriptive treatises and the contemporary practice of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples, it is the evening of the *mahotsava*'s 8th day during which a symbolical hunt takes place.⁶ On this particular evening the god usually leaves the temple on a horse-shaped *vāhana*

⁵ According to some sources it might range from 1 to 30 days, see PādS, *cp*, 10.22b–23; PārS 17.505–512, cf. Smith 1982: 29.

⁶ In Kerala manuals, where the description of a hunt is usually given after the account of *grāmabali* ceremony, it is generally held on a penultimate day of *mahotsava*, which usually lasts 7 or 10 days (Sarma 2014: 291).

(*aśva/turaga*),⁷ that is a mount associated with both a ruler and a chase, and as such is possibly the only one among the god's carriers which is rooted in a specific ritual context (Wessels-Mevissen 2011: 575). According to L'Hernault, not only a ritual hunt but all the phases of a Great Festival display connections to royal circles, as they share many features with the consecration of a king (*rājasūya*), which primarily aimed at regeneration of the procreative powers. In the Śaiva context this affinity is obvious, for instance, in relation to a prominent role of Somāskandamūrti during the procession. The figures of a divine family (Śiva, Ūma, Skanda) placed on a ceremonial seat represent a royal couple accompanied by their heir (L'Hernault 1985: 267). Similarly, in the context of Vaiṣṇava traditions, the Lord Viṣṇu, from early times the embodiment of a protective king and defender of *dharma* (Gonda 1969: 164ff.), leaves the temple with his two consorts, Śrī and Bhūmi. In most occurrences, a company of wives is observed also during his hunting trip performed within the framework of *mahotsava*.

The earliest Pāñcarātriśa source that discusses the hunt expedition in this particular instance might be the *Pādmasaṃhitā* (PādS). While its composition started at the beginning of the 12th century, the text surely became important for the Pāñcarātriśa ritual system by the time of Veṅkaṭanātha (1268–1369), who often quotes from its *caryāpada* section in his *Pāñcarātriśarakṣā* (Schwarz 2009: 30). The PādS *caryāpada* (*cp*) recommends a hunting/hunting procession (*mṛgayā/mṛgayātriśa*) in-between the immersing [a deity] in a water-vessel (*jaladroṇyavagāhana*)⁸

⁷ For a list of carriers used during *mahotsava* in Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples, see for instance Wessels-Mevissen 2011: 574–575.

⁸ The ceremony of *jaladroṇyavagāhana* occurs quite rarely in the *saṃhitās*, and if so, these are rather the late ones, which mention it (see fn 24, 25 and 26). In accordance with PādS, during the *jaladroṇyavagāhana* a water-vessel (*jaladroṇi*) should be placed in a golden cauldron (*kaṭāha*) upon a ladder situated in a pond, and filled with incensed water. Unbroken pearls are scattered around. After summoning Gaṅgā to its waters, it should be honoured. Then, a deity should be immersed in the water sanctified with Vedic mantras associated with water (*abliṅga*). Additionally, the *Vāruṇasūkta* should be loudly recited. Then the deity is taken to a *maṇḍapa* (PādS, *cp*, 11.189–195ab).

and a bath festival (*tīrtha*) (PādS, *cp*, 11.180). The whole PādS passage on a ritual hunt, including these two ceremonies which frame it, is permeated with the allusions to the deity's royal connotations. The term *jala-droṇī* in the meaning of a tub/water-vessel made of gold and filled with perfumed water in which a king takes his bath surrounded by courtesans showering him with scented water from pitchers is to be found for instance in Bāṇabhaṭṭa's prose poem (*kathā*) *Kadāmbari* (7th cent.).⁹ In turn, the bath festival (*tīrtha*), which in view of *saṃhitās* should be held on a day following *mṛgayotsava*, resonates with the king's need to purify after a hunting expedition. In Indian tradition, hunting itself, often associated with crossing the boundaries between cultivated and wild land,¹⁰ might foreshadow a war or subjugation of territory (L'Hernault, Reiniche 1999: 75). Therefore, as David Shulman observes, hunting is not only depicted by Indian poets as a king's recreation but, similarly to battles, also in terms of pollution. When in a consequence of shedding blood a ruler accumulates too much evil he "becomes obsessed with, ridding himself of it through effecting some kind of transfer" (Shulman 1985: 28).

In accordance with the PādS teachings, on the day previous to *jala-droṇyavagāhana*, the festival idol of a deity along with Śrī and Bhūmi is taken to a garden or another place (*udyānāda*), where at the assembly of men (*janasaṃsadī*), in a *maṇḍapa*, he is presented with various gifts (*upadā*) and offerings (*prābhṛta*)¹¹ brought by his devotees/subjects

⁹ See *Princess Kadāmbari by Bana* (Smith 2009: 61–62); cf. Ali 2004: 110. I thank Lidia Sudyka for this reference.

¹⁰ Thus, as L. Sudyka sums up, Sanskrit narratives depict hunting as leading to an encounter which symbolizes reconciliation of two distant spheres, be it the kingdom of human and animal (a king versus fauna and flora), world of *dharma* and *adharma* (a king versus thieves/tribals), violence versus renunciation (a king versus ascetics/*ṛṣis*), civilization versus chaos (a king versus demons), or civilization versus wilderness/fertility (a king versus a local woman) (Sudyka 2019: 277–278). On the concept of opposite yet complementary *kṣetra* (cultivated area) and *vana* (wild forested area), see Sontheimer 1987.

¹¹ The terms used to depict the event of receiving gifts/offerings by a god strongly connote his royal aspect, for instance: *upadā*—"a respectful present to a king

from different areas (*deśād deśād*) (PādS, *cp*, 11.181–183). Having recited a proper formula, a guru preaches to those who brought the gods and the others. He identifies with a god and in consequence of his identification with a deity, he grants all sorts of favours as a god does and is treated by the devotees as if he were a king with whom the god is homologized¹² (PādS, *cp*, 11.184–186).

The proper celebrations of *jaladronyavagāhana* are recommended for the following afternoon (*aparāhne*) (PādS, *cp*, 11.189–195ab). After completing them, the deity is mounted upon a carriage and taken to another *maṇḍapa*, where he is honoured.

For the following day, that is the actual day of *mṛgayātrā*, the text advises (PādS, *cp*, 11.196cd–201):

[...] Or on the day of a hunting procession (*mṛgayātrā*), having begun early in the morning like before (196), having performed procession (*utsava*) completely, there should be hunting (*mṛgayā*) at its end. Having settled [the deity] adorned with all ornaments proper for hunting, and (*tathā* T) with an armour and weapons suitable for it, on a prepared elephant, etc. or on an artificial horse, one should lead him to a village etc. like before, along with two goddesses, on a lion [throne] etc., accompanied by soldiers, elephants

or a person of a rank”, *prābhṛta*—present, gift, offering (esp. to a deity or a sovereign), cf. Monier-Williams 1995.

¹² PādS, *cp*, 11.184–186: *ito yāta mithas sarvaṃ ito yātam (yātam idaṃ sarvaṃ T, P₁, P₂) itīrya ca | devādīn api cāhartīn kāle vijñāpayet tataḥ ||184|| tanmayatvād deśikendro devo ’ham iti bhāvayet (bhāvayan T, P₁, P₂) | kuryād anugrahaṃ sarvaṃ devasyālokyā cānanam ||185|| abhiprāyaṃ yathārājño jñātvā tena pradārśanam (pradarśitam T, P₁, P₂) | bruvanti tatsamīpasthā rājñāṃ tattadanugrahaṃ ||186||*—“Then, uttering *ito...*(*yātam idaṃ sarvaṃ T, P₁, P₂*), he should inform the ones who have brought the gods and the others at the proper time (184). Since he is like him (lit. consists of him), as he realises (*bhāvayan T, P₁, P₂*) ‘I am the god’, the best among the teachers should grant all sorts of favours. Having looked at the god’s face (185) and having understood [his] kinglike wish that is indicated (*pradarśitam T, P₁, P₂*) by him, the ones standing close proclaim the various favours of the kings (186)”. I thank one of the peer-reviewers for suggesting the translation of this passage much better than mine.

etc. (199ab). One should worship the before bathed [god], seated in the middle of a golden seat, in a garden *maṇḍapa* (200ab). Having offered a great oblation in fire (*mahāhavis*) according to the rule in another *maṇḍapa*, one should mount [the idol] on a carriage (*yāna*). This night one should carry it to the temple (201ab).¹³

As the passage shows, this is rather the atmosphere of a deity's outing to a nearby garden, and not of a hunt itself, which is emphasized. The prescriptions give no details concerning the actual chasing of animals. They neither mention entering a forest, which naturally comes to mind when speaking about a hunt, by a deity. The impression that the motif is used rather for the sake of underlying the deity's royal aspects by means of referring to the popular way of a king's recreation concurs with the presence of the deity's two wives. If we refer to Sanskrit court literature, a garden landscape constitutes a usual setting for love-scenes, involving kings and their damsels (Sudyka 2009: 105–106). Also, in the light of Someśvara's encyclopedic *Mānasollāsa* (12th cent.), this is where the king goes with his wives and mistresses to enjoy games and, finally, to hide with them in a secluded spot (Ali 2003: 237). From the rise of Indian cities, carefully constructed and decorated gardens formed a part of palace-complexes, houses of eminent courtesans, they were also attached to religious institutions. For the Indian élite, their purpose, besides supplementing products for consumption, was to create a place of enjoyment, the concept mirrored in a term denoting a garden, *ārāma*, meaning “delight”, or in prefixing the terms for a garden with words evoking “pleasure” or “enjoyment” (*keli*, *krīḍā*, *pramada*)

¹³ PādS, cp, 11.196–201ab: [...] *mṛgayādīvase vāpi prātārārabhya pūrvavat* ||196|| *kṛtvotsavam aśeṣeṇa tasyānte mṛgayā bhavet | mṛgayānugūṇais sarvair bhūṣaṇair bhūṣitaṃ tattaḥ (tathā T)* ||197|| *tadyogyāyudhasannāhaṃ hastyāḍau parikalpīte | āropya kṛtrīme cāśve nayed grāmādi pūrvavat* ||198|| *devībhyāṃ saha siṃhāḍau sanyair hastyādibhir yutam | udyānamaṇṭape cāpi madhye sauvarnaviṣṭare* ||199|| *āsane tatra cāsīnaṃ snānapūrvam samarcayet | maṇṭape nyatra vīdhiṇā nivedya ca mahāhaviḥ* ||200|| *yānam ārāpya tadrātrau mandīrāntarbhuvam nayet |*

(Ali 2003: 223–224), the latter one also denoting various games (Ali 2003: 236). From this perspective, the PādS prescriptions seem to speak about a trip by Viṣṇu to a garden as culminating in a sort of a play, which would mean that the chase is purely performative. The passage reveals an affinity between a royal and temple sphere also by recalling a grand, noisy procession, which on the way to a garden displays the ruler's wealth and power. Viṣṇu leaving his abode in splendour is like a king leaving his palace along with his retinue to enjoy the shade of a garden. What is more, the deity acts as a king and is treated like a king both on the day preceding a hunting procession, when it receives gifts and honours as if holding court in public, and on the proper day of celebrations, when elephants, an essential attribute of rulers,¹⁴ are mentioned as taking part in the procession. However, the deity's expedition seems to be devoid of a strong territorial dimension, so often emphasized in modern processions by means of demarcating a meaningful space through a route traversed by a paraded idol. Here the procession's movement is depicted rather as linear than circular, with the area within which the deity moves quite limited. The deity goes beyond the temple, yet it is taken to a garden-*mandapa* built somewhere nearby in a village to provide him with an opportunity to enjoy a hunting game in the company of his wives, and then brought back. In accordance with the Indian concept of garden, locating it beyond human habitations does not mean it is imbued with imagery of a wild, distant place. Contrary, being artificial products, the gardens were always perceived as belonging to society (Ali 2003: 223). This idea seems to explain why despite going for a hunt outside the temple, Viṣṇu is still joined by his wives. Remarkably, in view of Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions, the goddess should not trespass on the temple's threshold, or, rather exceptionally, at least the lanes encompassed by the temple walls, which possibly reflect the tendency to put certain restrictions on women (Narayanan 1998: 104). Here, despite its location, the garden

¹⁴ According to Orr, in Tamil inscriptions till the 15th cent. elephants are referred to only in the context of royal, not temple, processions (Orr 2004: 445, fn 8).

in a way belongs to the territory of the temple so it seems there is nothing improper or unsafe in Śrī and Bhūmi visiting it.

The *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā* (PārS), which was compiled of, *inter alia*, passages borrowed from the PādS, and was most likely composed between 1100 and 1300 A.D. (Rastelli 2006: 54), presents similar circumstances of ritual hunting. However, if the PādS discusses this issue in only one passage, the PārS refers to it several times. For instance, PārS 19.169cd–170 prescribes rituals such as appeasement (*śāntihomādika*) if *mṛgayotsava*, held in a garden as a sport (*līlayā*), is skipped. Yet, whereas another passage, PārS 18.318–319, cursorily mentions the hunting trip as again limited to the area of a garden, the PārS 8.112 does not define the territory covered by the procession, saying instead that wherever the Lord goes during his hunting or other festivals, a certain processional image should be taken for the sake of unobstructed accomplishment of aims.¹⁵ Nonetheless, this is again the occasion of *mahotsava*, namely its eighth day, which is discussed in detail. On a day preceding the hunting procession, after morning rituals are completed, a “gem among horses” (*aśvaratna*) adorned with all ornaments should be brought along with a number of other horses (PārS 17.348cd–349a: *aśvaratnaṃ samānīya sarvālaṅkāraśobhitam* ||348|| *bahubhis turagaiḥ sārdham*). Similarly, as in the case of PādS, the PārS alternatively recommends to mount the Lord on an elephant which could be either natural or substituted by a *vāhana* (PārS 17.349bcd: *hastinaṃ vā tathāvidham | svabhāvaṃ kṛtrimaṃ vāpi tatrāropya jag-atpatim* ||349||). Along with his two consorts, the god, provided with ornaments suitable for hunting, is seated in a golden carriage that is installed upon a mount (PārS 17.350). Surrounded by soldiers, devotees and other visitors, the carriage is firstly taken to a village, which

¹⁵ PārS 19.169–170: [...] *tathodyāne līlayā mṛgayotsave* ||169|| *mṛgāyān viśeṣeṇa lopaḥ sañjāyate yadi | śāntihomādikaṃ tattat kṛtvā śeṣaṃ samācaret* ||170||

PārS 18.318cd: *mṛgayādyutsave prāpte bahur udyānabhūmiṣu* ||318cd||

PārS 8.112: *mṛgayādyutsave prāpte yatra yatra vrajet prabhuḥ | tatra tatra nayed enān nirvighnaphalasiddhaye* ||112||

is then circumambulated by the procession (*paribhrāmya grāmādaḥ*). After that, the god, along with his wives, is taken to a garden:

Then, one should carry the god into the pleasant *maṇḍapa*, decorated everywhere with canopy etc., built in the middle of the large garden arranged outside the village within the distance of one *krośa*, pleasant due to manifold trees, o twice-born!, ponds, mass of colourful creepers in bloom (354ab). One should settle the Lord of World on a beautiful golden seat with Śrī and Bhūmi behind (355a). Having especially reduced his heat/sweat with a help of the air cooled by fans, sandal paste etc., perfumes and cooling cold water, as in the case of the king of kings' (*rājarājavat*), one should then worship him with *arghya* etc. (356abc). One should offer him food consisting of pure sour milk mixed with shining aromatic powder and cumin seeds etc, treacles of molasses together with multiple beverages, sweet fruits starting with fruits of plantain trees (358ab). Having offered everything in a due order, with betel at the end, then one should worship the before bathed god in due order with a great wealth, along with Lakṣmī and Puṣṭi (359). Having offered collected food and having adorned [him] in a special way, one should mount him on a horse etc. when the sun sets (360). Having taken him to circumambulate the village with hundreds of lights, one should take the god to the temple as said before, and perform a regular procession (361).¹⁶

¹⁶ PārS 17.352cd–361: *tato grāmasya bāhye tu krośamātrāntarīkrte | udyāne vitate ramye vicitrāḥ pādapair dvija ||352|| sarasībhir vicitrābhiḥ latābhrndaiś ca puṣpitaiḥ | śobhite ca samānīya devaṃ tanmdhyasaṁsthite ||353|| maṇṭape tu vitānādyaiḥ sarvataḥ paribhūṣite | sauvarṇe viṣṭare ramye samāropya jagatpatim ||354|| śrībhūmisahitaṃ paścād chūtalair vyajanānilaiḥ | candanādyaiḥ sugandhaiś ca himatoyaiś ca śūtalaiḥ ||355|| svedaśāntim samāpādy viśeṣād rājarājavat | tato 'rghyādibhir abharcya dadhyannam vinivedayet ||356|| marīcicūrṇasaṁmiśraṃ jīrakādisanvitam | gulakhaṇḍayutaṃ śud-dham pānakāni bahūny api ||357|| kadalīphalapūrvāni madhurāni phalāny api | sarvaṃ tāmbūladānāntaṃ kramāt kṛtvā tataḥ param ||358|| snānapūrvam samabhyarcya mahatā vibhavana tu | yathākrameṇa deveśam lakṣmīpuṣṭisamanvitam ||359|| nivedya ca pramūtānnaṃ alaṃkṛtya viśeṣataḥ | turagādaḥ samāropya astaṃ yāte divākare ||360|| dīpānekaśatair yuktaṃ grāmaṃ nītvā pradakṣiṇam | devaṃ gehe praveṣyātha prāgvat kuryān nityotsavam ||361||*

As in the PādS's case, the above passage of PārS evokes the ambiance of a hunting as a sort of a royal pastime, yet free of any violence. The purpose of the sojourn is again to enjoy time with the wives in a garden rather than to prowl or inspect a forest. Having reached the retreat, the deity like a king of kings (*rājarājavat*) is cooled down and served with various refreshments, culminating with offering betel, that is a stimulant, which besides its health and medical aspects, in Indian literature is often related to court life and the art of love (Cielas 2016: 166). In comparison to the PādS description, slightly more details regarding both the territory marked by the procession and the direction of its movement are given: the route is extended for it leads to a garden outside the boundaries of the village (*grāmasya bāhye*). The route's extension does not however significantly impact the meaning of a hunt in relation to its territory, since the garden, as mentioned above, belongs to the temple.

Certain PārS passages concerning hunting find analogy in the *Īśvarasamhitā* (ĪS), which is believed to be composed not earlier than the late 13th or 14th century, most likely on the PārS model (Matsubara 1996: 28–31). For instance, the PārS 8.112 (see fn 15) is parallel with ĪS 8.109. In addition, similarly to the PārS 19.169–170, the ĪS 19.614–615 refers to *mṛgayotsava*¹⁷ in the context of rituals of appeasement (*śāntihoma*) prescribed if hunting and other festivals are omitted ([...] *mṛgayādyutsave* [...] *lupte*). In this case, however, a hunting trip, along with a swinging festival (*ḍolotsava*), is characterized as pastimes belonging to the Spring Festival (*vasantotsava*)¹⁸ considered a part of *mahotsava*.¹⁹

¹⁷ However, ĪS 25.119cd briefly mentions hunting in terms of procession (*yātrāsu mṛgayādike*).

¹⁸ On *vasantotsava* in Sanskrit literature see for instance Anderson 1992 and Pierdominici Leão 2018.

¹⁹ ĪS 19.614–615: *mahotsavāṅgabhūte tu vasantotsavakarmanī | ḍolotsave ca mṛgayādyutsave ca munīśvarāḥ ||614|| yuddhārambhe ca devībhyām tathā cūrnābhiṣecane | lupte kuryāc śāntihomaṃ tattaddoṣopasāntaye ||615||*—“Oh great sages! But when a swing festival (*ḍolotsava*), hunting (*mṛgayā*) and other festivals, which are activities associated with *vasantotsava* being a part of *mahotsava* (614), as well

Confusingly, in early mythology and Sanskrit ritual treatises, *vasantotsava* was known as *navarātri* (the Nine Nights), namely under the same term as the *mahānavamī* festival focused on the Goddess's victory over the demon. It was in the Vijayanagara period when both became separate South Indian "magnificent courtly festivals in [...] which the king played a pivotal role" (Dallapiccola 2013: 278). Yet, according to Vijayanagara sources and historical accounts, contrary to the *mahānavamī* solemn and formal celebrations held in September–October, the *vasantotsava* which was celebrated with the advent of Spring was of a communal character, involving dancing, performances and throwing colourful powders at each other and other activities. Its aim was the reinforcement of the power of a king, who through homologization with a deity established links between the spheres of the human and the divine (Dallapiccola 2013: 289). The above-mentioned *Virupākṣavasantotsavacampū* (15th cent.) depicts the nine-day long *vasantotsava* in a way which to some extent blurs distinctions between it and *mahotsava*. The Spring Festival commences with flag hoisting and ends with the ablution of images in the river Tuṅgabhadra. On full moon, the *rathotsava* ('car-festival') followed by *mṛgayotsava* takes place. The *vasantotsava* concludes with an argument between the god Virupākṣa and the goddess Pampā. The reason for their fight is the god's foray into the forest where he romances with celestial ladies. Yet, having reconciled, the couple eventually marries (Dallapiccola 2013: 288). Such a close bond between the hunting trip and an erotic mood, an essential feature of the *vasantotsava*, might be alluded in ĪS 11.312–314ab²⁰ for

as undertaking of a struggle with two goddesses and smearing with tumeric powder are dropped, one should perform *śāntihoma* for appeasing of respective faults (615)".

²⁰ ĪS 11.312–314ab: *aṣṭame 'hni tu tadṛātau ḍolārohaṇam ūrvakam | aśvārohaṇam tataḥ kuryāt mṛgayām cāpi kārayet* ||312|| *bhaktasantrāṇalīlām ca brāhme nagaraśodhanam | praṇayaḥ kalahaś ca syād devyor devena vai miśraḥ (mithaḥ?)* ||313|| *sandhānam ubhayoḥ kuryāt kṣamyatām iti coccaret* |—"On the night of the eighth day there is a great festival of swing (*ḍolārohana*). Then one should mount [a diety] upon a horse and make [him] perform hunting (312) and a game of saving devotees and, at dawn? (*brāhme*), purificating a town. Affection and argument should set forth between the god and the two goddesses by a dispute (*mithaḥ*) (313). [Then] one should

it mentions a quarrel²¹ between the god and his consort(s) which takes place after his hunting trip, and culminating in their reconciliation.

Viśvāmitrasaṃhitā (ViśS), which is possibly later than PārS and richly borrows from the PādS (Rastelli 2006: 301–302), echoes the PādS's view on a hunting trip as an integral constituent of *mahotsava*. However, the relevant passage does not reveal any particularities about the course of hunting procession. Actually, it is limited to scheduling *mṛgayotsava* for a day between a *jaladroṇyavagāhana* ceremony and a *tīrtha* festival (comp. PādS, *cp*, 11.180), which corresponds to the eighth day of *mahotsava* (ViśS 18.135). Before the ceremony of *jaladroṇyavagāhana* the text prescribes the god's trip to a hut in a garden (*udyānavāṭikā*) with two goddesses (presumably Śrī and Bhūmī),²² where they are entertained with music, dance and plays (ViśS 18.129–134):

On the day before *tīrthotsava* one should perform *mṛgayotsava*. One day before that, the immersion in a water-vessel (*jaladroṇyavagāhana*) should be performed (129). On the occasion former to that, having mounted the deity with two goddesses on the golden seat, and having made the streets particularly beautified (130), having carried [him] around everywhere, he should lead him into a hut in a garden (131ab). The one who is experienced in it should prepare a particular idol there (131cd). He should also organize performances of songs, dance and plays (132ab). In this way he should daily perform a particular *mahotsava* (132cd). He should offer him a whole collected gift at the assembly of men and himself assure them about the grace of deity, having looked at the deity's lotus-face. The attentive one, having thought "I am the god", should distribute *prasāda* etc. (134). Thus, when the eight days during *mahotsava* are

perform [their] re-uniting and say 'Let it be forgiven'". In the verse 313b I take the word *brāhme* as *brāhmanūhurte*.

²¹ A quarrel between the god and his consort may constitute a separate festival, called variously: *kalahotsava*, *praṇayakalahotsava*, *madhumāsotsava* (for the list of relevant passages in the Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās* see Smith 1982: 48, fn 25).

²² See also ViśS 10.134, 17.124, 18.124 (for this remark I thank one of the peer-reviewers).

gone by, and the asterism (*nakṣatra*) proper for bath (*tīrtha*) occurs, on the ninth day a teacher [...] (135).²³

The pattern similar to that of PādS/ViśS is also hinted at in a short passage of the possibly post-Rāmānuja *Aniruddhasaṃhitā* (AnS) (Smith 1975–1980: 42), which immediately after enumerating the *vāhanas* proper for consecutive days of *mahotsava*, with a horse appropriate for the procession held on its eighth day (AnS 21.51–53ab), briefly advises the hunting (*mṛgayā*) before the ceremony of a bath (*tīrthādhivāsana*) but after a water-play (*jalakrīḍā*) (AnS 21.53cd–54ab).²⁴ The ceremony

²³ ViśS 18.129–135: *tīrthotsavāt pūrvadine mṛgayotsavam ācaret | tatpūrvadivase kāryaṃ jaladroṇyavagāhanam ||129|| tatpūrvāvasare devaṃ devībhyāṃ saha viṣṭare | haime 'dhiropya vīthīś ca śobhayitvā viśeṣataḥ ||130|| paribhrāmya ca sarvatra nayed udyānavāṭikāṃ | tatrāpi ca viśeṣārcāṃ kārayet tadvicakṣaṇaḥ ||131|| gītanṛttādikāḥ sarvāḥ krīḍāḥ saṃdarśayet tathā | evaṃ pratidināṃ kuryāt saviśeṣamahotsavam ||132|| āhṛtaṃ prābhṛtaṃ sarvaṃ darśayej janasaṃsadi | devasyānugrahaṃ teṣāṃ svayam ājñāpayet tathā ||133|| āloka cānanāmbhojaṃ devasya susamāhitaḥ | matvā ca devo 'ham iti prasādādi samācaret ||134|| evaṃ aṣṭāsv atīteṣu divaseṣu mahotsave | jāte ca tīrthana-kṣatre navame 'hani deśikam ||135||*

Comp. with PādS, cp, 11.180–181, 183, 185; see fn 12.

²⁴ The term *jalakrīḍā* is confusing for it brings associations with joyful frolicking in water that are characteristic, for instance, for *vasantotsava* but also for garden related entertainments in general (Ali 2003: 236) which are often depicted in the *kāvya* literature in connection to a *śṛṅgāraraśa* (Sudyka 2009: 108). However, the PārS passage (17.325–347ab) mentions *jalakrīḍā* in the context of the events related to the seventh day of *mahotsava*, that is a day which precedes the god's hunt. Contrary to the PādS account, the PārS prescribes to place a water-vessel (*jaladroṇī*) in a *maṇḍapa*, on a platform covered with rice (*maṇṭapasyaikaadeśe tu śālitaṇḍulanirmite*). The vessel is filled with strained, fragrant water. In its vicinity, the idol is placed and worshipped with *arghya* offerings etc. and praised with benedictions. Afterwards, he is immersed in/bathed with the water from the vessel with recitation of *Puruṣasūkta* (*Rgveda* 10.90). The idol, in wet robes, is taken on a carriage to the temple's court-yard and streets for the sake of Varuṇa's joy and purification of all people. All those who watch him with devotion will be free from infliction and have their sins burnt. The ĪS, in turn, appears to mingle the notion of *jalakrīḍā* in the sense of joyful plays with water during spring festivities, with *jalakrīḍā* denoting immersing the idol in the waters of *jaladroṇī*. The ĪS 12.24 recommends to perform the god's *jalakrīḍā* in the bright fortnight of spring (*madhumādhavamāse tu śuklapakṣe*) in connection to the 9,7,5,3 or 1-day

of immersion in a water-vessel as held on the occasion of *mahotsava*'s eighth day is also alluded to in the so-called *Adhikapāṭha* which is a late interpolated section of the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* (JaySA).²⁵ Apart from relating that on the night following the eighth day of *mahotsava* the deity seated on a horse was carried to purify (*āpāvayat*) all worlds, there is however no explicit mention of *mrgayotsava*.²⁶

An important deviation in the way of celebrating the god's hunt within the *mahotsava* seems to occur in the *Mārkaṇḍeyaśaṃhitā* (MārKS) and the *Puruṣottamasāṃhitā* (PurS). Contrary to the above-mentioned sources, both recommend to parade the god not to a garden but to a forest, a fact which implicates a number of various consequences.

The MārKS is not quoted by any Pāñcarātra-related commentator, which may point (but not necessarily) to its late composition (Smith 1975–1980: 325, cf. Gonda 1977: 106). While teaching on the ritual hunt it advises taking the deity in a carriage to a new garden (*apūrvodyānayanādi gatvā*). Afterwards, the deity is carried back

utsava. In short, after circumambulating a village along with two consorts, the quarrel (*yuddhakrīḍā*) of the God and the goddesses should be performed (ĪS 12.22–23). During the mocked quarrel, in which devotees, *gaṇikās* and *devadasīs* participate (ĪS 12.37), various substances are thrown at each other on particular days, including water on the ninth day of celebrations (*jalayuddhaka*) (ĪS 12.35–17ab). If *utsava* lasts for one day, only the fight with water (*jalayuddha*) is recommended (ĪS 12.40). Nonetheless, the instruction how to perform *jalakrīḍā* given in the next passage (ĪS 12.41–57) reminds the rules of the *jalakrīḍā* known from the PārS, with some passages almost reproduced (comp. PārS 17.341–342 with ĪS 12.51–52). The only difference is that before recommending to take the god in his wet robes around the village (ĪS 12.57–58), the ĪS urges all the people of various classes to sprinkle each other with the sanctified water, which provides them with fruits similar to those obtained due to the bath in Gaṅgā and gaining the state of being identical with Viṣṇu (*viṣṇusāyujya*) (ĪS 12.53–56).

²⁵ The section is usually dated to the second half of the 14th cent. (for discussion on its dating see for instance Leach 2014: 121–122).

²⁶ JaySA 151cd–152ab: *aṣṭame tu jaladroṇīm avagāhya divā hariḥ ||151|| rātrau turaṅgam āsthāya sarvāl lokān apāvayat* |—"Having immersed [the deity] in the water-vessel (*jaladroṇī*) on the eight day, having settled [him] on a horse at night, Hari made [him] purify all worlds".

to the village and next (on the following day?) travels on a horseback to a forest (*kānana*). There, the killing of animals believed to be demons in disguise (*rakṣasāṃ mṛgaveśānām hatvā*) is prescribed. The passage seems to stress that performance of hunting is interconnected with entering the woods (instead of a garden), and, what is more, the wild surroundings determine the absence of goddesses by the god's side. In contradistinction to the already discussed passages that mentioned a garden as the hunt's setting, here the goddesses are not included into the god's retinue. In addition, the hunting trip demands the tying of a *rakṣābandha*, a thread which is usually supposed to be a protection from bad influences (MārKS 22.57–66ab):

Having made *rakṣābandha* for the sake of *mṛgayātrā*, on the eighth day one should make him perform the *mṛgayātrā* (57). Having gone to a garden etc. with devotees, having entered the site, one should again perform ablution (58). Having made *rakṣābandha* for the sake of a procession to the village, one should offer the food of four kinds to the deity (59). Having mounted the deity on the horse, they should go towards the forest (*kānana*) (60ab). Having killed the demons disguising themselves in wild deer, o the best of kings!, having come again to a village and other [places] one should lead [the deity] to a dwelling (61ab). Later one should give a bath together with cloths, ornaments, garlands [to a deity] (61cd). Having discharged all festival idols, at the end of bath, the best among teachers should prepare a platform in the vicinity of the immovable idol (*mūlabera*) (62). Then having offered a filled jar containing nine cloths of the weight of nine *bhāra*, he should embellish it with cloth and threads (63). He should prepare a golden statue and put it inside the jar (64ab). Having placed it on the platform, he should worship the Highest Being (64cd). He should spend the rest of the night continuing [the ritual] with unextinguished lamps (65ab). When the bright daybreak comes, having accomplished a regular worship, the worshipper who realized his duty should cause the bath (*tīrtha*)-rituals to be made (66ab).²⁷

²⁷ MārKS 22.57–66ab: *rakṣābandhaṃ tataḥ kṛtvā mṛgayātrārtham eva ca | aṣṭame divase prāpte mṛgayātrāṃ ca kārayet ||57|| apūrvodyānayanādi gatvā bhaktajanaḥ saha | ālayaṃ saṃpraviśyātha punaḥ snapanam ācāret ||58|| rakṣābandhaṃ tataḥ*

The PurS, which is a text roughly dated by Smith to the times after Rāmānuja or even after Veṅkatanātha (Smith 1975–1980: 274), gives much more detailed instructions how to perform a god’s hunt. The Lord is mounted on the “gem among horses” (*aśvaratna*) and taken to a great forest (*vipinam mahat*) where a group of armed men should encircle unspecified ferocious animals. The beasts are to be captured alive. Having caught them, soldiers should present them in front of the god, and then to release them, one by one. In the case of their death, they will receive merit. After disposing of the animals, a priest, who holds a bow and arrows, pays honour to the deity and on the deity’s behalf shoots four arrows in four directions and one upwards (PurS 24.174cd–181):

Now I will tell particularly about the best *mṛgayotsava* which causes Lord’s pleasure [and] destroys all misfortune (175ab). For the sake of *mṛgayotsava*’s procession, on the eighth day, one should mount the Omnipresent one together with journey-paraphernalia, particularly adorned, on a gem among horses decorated with various ornaments (176). With a great group of people, one should lead him to a great forest (177ab). Having worshipped him there particularly, one should make him perform hunting (177cd). Having arranged the army around, one should put ferocious animals in the middle (178ab). One should make the soldiers capture animals. They should demonstrate the animals in front of Hari, and, gradually, release them outside (179ab). An eternal merit would be if ferocious creatures are killed (179cd). In front of the god, the one who has a bow and arrows, should pay honour. He should release four arrows in four directions and one upwards (180). Then, having worshipped

kṛtvā grāmayātrārtham eva ca | annam caturvidham caiva devāya ca nivedayet ||59||
aśvam āropayed devam gaccheyuḥ kānaṇam prati | rakṣasām mṛgaveśāṇām hatvā
tu nrpasattama ||60|| *punar āgamyā grāmādīn ālayaṁ saṃpraveśayet | snapanam*
kārayet paścāt vastrābharaṇamālyakaiḥ ||61|| *visṛjya kautukān sarvān snānānte*
deśikottamaḥ | mūlaberasamīpe tu sthaṇḍilaṁ kārayet tataḥ ||62|| *navabhārapramāṇena*
navavastreṇa saṃyutam | pūrṇakumbhaṁ samādāya bhūṣayed vastrasūtrakaiḥ ||63||
sauvarṇapratimām kuryāt kumbhamadhye vinikṣipet | sthaṇḍilopari vinyasya pūjayet
puruṣottamam ||64|| *anīrvāṇapradīpaiś ca rātriśeṣaṁ samāpayet | prabhāte vimale*
śuddhe kṛtakṛtyaḥ sa pūjakah ||65|| *nityapūjām samāpyātha tīrthakarmāṇi kārayet |*

the god according to [his] wealth, he should bring him to a temple after circumambulating a village (181). On the following night there should be the bath and installation of the idol etc. (182ab)²⁸

Worthy of notice are two motifs that occur in the above passage—seizing beasts and shooting arrows in various directions. Both find analogy in prescriptions concerning a ritual hunt in a few other *saṃhitās* which, however, conceptualize them differently. Still, despite the context, all of them maintain that if hunting takes place in a forest, only a male deity can join it.

The recommendation to capture animals is found in the ĪS 13.251cd–263ab which, besides sharing some features with the PurS teaching (a hunt designated as *uttama*, a prescription to bring *aśvaratna* “a gem among horses”²⁹) departs from associating the hunt with *mahotsava*. Instead, it schedules it for the day following the *makara-saṃkrānti*, which falls in mid-January:

When the sun transits into the Makara, o twice born ones!, having bathed the God of Gods with 25 jars, one should adorn him particularly and offer an oblation in fire (*havis*) etc. (252). At that time a patron (*yajamāna*) should make a donation of cows, land, gold and so on, and of a pumpkin gourd and rice as well, for the deity’s contentment (253). On the other day, having worshipped particularly

²⁸ PurS 24.174cd–182: *atha vakṣye viśeṣeṇa mṛgayotsavam uttamam* ||174|| *bhagavatprītijanakam sarvāriṣṭavināśakam* | *mṛgayotsavayātrāyai cāṣṭame divase vibhum* ||175|| *yātropakaraṇais sārddham alaṅkṛtyaviśeṣataḥ* | *aśvaratne samāropya nānālaṅkāraśobhite* ||176|| *mahatā janasaṅghena gamayed vipinaṃ mahat* | *tatrābhycaya viśeṣeṇa mṛgayām kārayet tataḥ* ||177|| *senām vinyasya paritaḥ madhye krīramṛgasthitim* | *tathā kṛtvā bhaṭāṃs tatra mṛgān baddhvā hareḥ puraḥ* ||178|| *darśayeyuḥ mṛgāṃs tān mocayeyuḥ kramād bahiḥ* | *hatānāṃ krīrajantūnāṃ bhavet punyam anantakam* ||179|| *devasya tu purobhāge dhanurbāṇo prapūjayet* | *caturdikṣu caturbāṇān ūrdhve caikam visarjayet* ||180|| *tato devaṃ tu sampūjya yathā-vibhavavistaram* | *grāmapradakṣiṇenaiva cālayan sampraveśayet* ||181|| *tasyām apararātrau tu tīrthabimbādivāsanam* |

²⁹ The expression “gem among horses” (*aśvaratna*) that designates the mount of the deity occurs also in the PārS 17.348cd.

the God of Gods, having mounted the god who travels in his festival image on a gem among horses, one should perform the best *mṛga-yotsava* according to the previously mentioned rule (255ab). Having taken the Lord of World to each and every forest playfully, having particularly worshipped him there according to the rule, one should perform hunting afterwards with amusement, o great sages! (256) Having procured in the middle a boar, an elephant, a tiger, a black and spotted antelope etc., one should arrange the army provided with weapons around [the animals] (257). Having entered there, inside, carefully, [and] having captured animals alive, the extremely heroic warriors should lead them in front of god (258). Then one should set free all the beasts one by one gradually, or, if wild animals are killed, their merit is certain (259). Then, having placed the Lord of the Chiefs of the Gods in a *maṇḍapa* or at the place for supplying water or other (*prapādike*), in a splendid seat, having honoured him particularly, when the evening comes, along with the previously mentioned properties (*pūrvoktavibhavaḥ*), one should carry him around the village and take him inside the temple eventually (261). Having bathed the God of Gods, having adorned him according to the rule, one should offer an oblation in fire (*havis*) for the Omnipresent one along with Śrī and Puṣṭi (261). Thus the *mṛgayotsava* of the God of Gods has been explained (263ab).³⁰

³⁰ ĪS 13.251cd–263ab: *makarasthe dinakare tatkāle saṅkrame dvijāḥ* ||251|| *saṁsnāpya devadeveṣaṁ pañcaviṁśatibhir ghaṭaiḥ* | *alaṁkṛtya viśeṣeṇa havirādān nivedayet* ||252|| *tatkāle yajamānaś ca gobhūsvaṛṇādikāṁs tathā* | *kūśmaṇḍavrihīdānaṁ ca kuryād devasya tuṣṭaye* ||253|| *tadanyedyur devadevaṁ samabhyarcya viśeṣataḥ* | *aśvatatne samāropya devam utsavabimbagam* ||254|| *pūrvoktavidhinā kuryān mṛgayotsavam uttamam* | *vane vane samānīya savilāsaṁ jagatpatim* ||255|| *tatra tatra viśeṣeṇa samabhyarcya yathāvidhi* | *mṛgayāṁ kārayet paścāt savinodaṁ munīśvarāḥ* ||256|| *varāhavarāṇavyāghrakṛṣṇasāraśāśādikān* | *madhye kṛtvā tu paritaḥ senāṁ vinyasya sāyudhām* ||257|| *atiśūrabhaṭās tatra madhye saṁviśya yatnataḥ* | *jīvagrāhaṁ mṛgān badhvā nayeyur devasannidhim* ||258|| *tato vimocayet sarvān mṛgān ekaikaśaḥ kramāt* | *hatānām vā mṛgānām ca bhavet puṇyagatir dhruvam* ||259|| *tatas tu devadeveṣaṁ maṇṭape vā prapādike* | *bhadrāsane samāropya samabhyarcya viśeṣataḥ* ||260|| *sāyaṅkāle tu samprāpte pūrvoktavibhavaḥ saha* | *grāmapradakṣiṇaṁ nītvā mandirāntaḥ praveśayet* ||261|| *saṁsnāpya devadeveṣaṁ alaṁkṛtya yathāvidhi* | *śrīpuṣṭībhyāṁ saha vibhuṁ havirantaṁ samarcayet* ||262|| *evaṁ hi devadevasya mṛgayotsava īritāḥ* |

The date of the procession's departure and the mention of offerings which include pumpkin gourd and rice (*kūśmāṇḍavṛhidāna*) suggests that the ĪS passage contextualizes the hunt within the harvest festivities. Moreover, taking the idol from forest to forest (*vane vane*), where he is worshipped each and every time properly, instead of carrying him to a particular spot, seems to indicate that the manner of celebrating the god's hunting trip is much more elaborate than as a part of *mahotsava*. The festivities require the presence of a wealthy patron (*yajamāna*), who, among other donations, presents the deity with land. With the exception of the element of slaughter, these prescriptions to some extent reflect a current way of celebrating a hunting festival in Ahobilam, where the deity alone³¹ starts his march on a day that follows *makarasamkrānti* (in the Andhra region associated with a harvest festival), and visits a number of more or less distant sites, in bygone times most probably situated amongst the forests.³² We also know that donations must have been instrumental in shaping the procession's route in the case of Ahobilam for it has extended significantly, with more and more villages 'buying' the right to host the deity.³³

The joyful character of festivities is conveyed by the emphasis on an entertaining mood of the procession's participants (ĪS 11.255d: *savilāsam*; 11.256d: *savinodaṃ*). Nonetheless, both PurS and ĪS point to the fact that the concept of killing wild animals during the hunt, even

³¹ Actually, in Ahobilam two processional idols of Narasiṃha go for a hunting trip: one belonging to the Ahobilanarasimhasvāmī Temple in Upper Ahobilam, the other to the Prahādavarada Temple in Lower Ahobilam. They travel together in a palanquin carried by men from families who have hereditary rights to serve Lord in this way.

³² The present shape of the god's expedition around the site suggests that both in the case of its structure and various meanings assigned to it, the ritual hunt has been impacted by the beliefs and the way of life of the Ceñcū hunter-gathering tribe prevalent in this area since ages.

³³ For instance, Ramaswamy Ayyangar, in his "A Descriptive History of the Forgotten Shrines of Ahobilam (in the Kurnool District)" published in Walajabad in 1916, mentions that while during his visit to Ahobilam at the beginning of the 20th century the deity travelled for 1,5 months to visit 26 villages, formerly it used to be out for only one week, halting in 19 sites.

though symbolical and/or involving effigies, was known to Vaiṣṇavas, usually seen as celebrating *mṛgayotsava* in a calm way deprived of bloody episodes, with a procession aimed exclusively at reaching a garden or a forest (Orr 2004: 443).

Actually, the methods of chasing animals echo in both cases the relevant accounts of Śaiva *Kārāṇāgama* and *Rauravāgama*. According to the former, which prescribes the *mṛgayātrā* for Śiva in his aspect of Kirātārjuna, the Destroyer of Tripura (Tripurāntaka) or a hunter (Kirāta) for the penultimate day of *mahotsava*, the beasts should be seized (*grah*).³⁴ What is interesting, apart from providing the Lord with proper weapons, paraphernalia, ornaments and a mount, Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās* do not speak about any particular aspect of Viṣṇu for *mṛgayotsava*. The aspects of Śiva recommended for the hunting trip by the *Kārāṇāgama* and *Rauravāgama*—a *ghora* form or a hunter—recall however the features of Narasiṃha who is the agent of the grand hunting festival in Ahobilam. Being, in the view of Brahmanic traditions, a unique *ugra* aspect of Viṣṇu, according to local beliefs Narasiṃha roamed around the forests surrounding Ahobilam after killing the demon Hiranyakaśipu. A relief in the Prahādavarada Temple depicts Narasiṃha as a hunter in a company of a Ceñcū girl holding a bow in his hand. In addition, due to his ferociousness the processionary idol of Narasiṃha from the Ahobilarasimhasvāmī Temple does

³⁴ *Kārāṇāgama* 1.141.193–197ab: *tīrthāhāt pūrvadvase mṛgayātrām sam-ārabhet | kirātārjunarūpaṃ vā tripurāntakam eva vā* ||193|| *kirātārūpavatsarvān viśeṣād eva dhārayet | kecid vāyusamārūḍhāḥ kecid vāyudhavāhanāḥ* ||194|| *kecit khaḍgadharāś caiva kecid cāpadharāś tathā | kecit kundadharāś caiva kecit pāśadharāś tathā* ||195|| *mahājanasamāyuktāḥ kecid yuddhonmukhā narāḥ | gajāṃ caiva mṛgaṃ caiva varāhaṃ vā kapim punaḥ* ||196|| *mayūrakukkuṭādīni pakṣiṇo vividhān grahet* —“On the day previous to the day of bath (*tīrtha*) one should commence *mṛgayātrā* (193ab). One should bear an image of Kiratārjuna, Tripurāntaka, indeed, or, especially, all [images] having the form of a hunter (194ab). Some are mounted on living beings, or some bear weapons (194bc), and some carry swords, and some carry bows as well (195ab). Some carry vessels and some carry noose as well. Some people, joined by a multitude of men, wait for fight (196ab). One should seize an elephant, deer, a boar or, moreover, a monkey, a peacock, a wild cock and other kinds of birds (197ab).”

not need during the hunting expedition, which embarks on the day following *makarasamkrānti*, any emblem or token (as a turban or a knife) that would point to the fact that he is going on a hunt.

The *Rauravāgama* (*kriyāpāda*)³⁵ speaks in turn about a hunt performed along with a dancing festival (*nṛttotsava*), during which the idol is carried outside the temple for the sake of killing wild animals and others (*mṛgādīnām vadhārthāya*). All the beings who are killed during the hunting, including people, gain the state of being identical with Śiva (*hatās cet prāṇinaḥ sarve śivasāyujyam āpnuyuh*; comp. with PurS 179c: *hatānām krūrajantūnām bhavet puṇyam anantakam*; ĪS 13.259cd *hatānām vā mṛgānām ca bhavet puṇyagatir dhruvam*). The *Rauravāgama* does not seem to take into account the option of releasing captured animals. It rather implies that hunting is a dangerous sport, during which not only animals but also people may lose their life, but, if so, they get a chance to achieve Śaivahood.

The most important elements of *mṛgayotsava*/*mṛgayātrā* taught by the *saṃhitās* in relation to *mahotsava* are given in table no 1.

³⁵ *Rauravāgama*, kp, 18.111cd–117: *nṛttotsavasya kāle tu mṛgayām vā samācaret* ||111|| *kāle vā mṛgayāyās tu tathā nṛttotsavam bhavet* | *vyatyāsenāśayā caitau kalpayet kalpavittamaḥ* ||112|| *sukhāsanādibimbaṃ vā viśeṣāt tripurāntakam* | *pratisaramḥ bandhayitvā pūrvoktavidhinaiva tu* ||113|| *tathaiva ca dviguṇakām arcām kṛtvā viśeṣataḥ* | *sarvālaṃkārasaṃyuktaṃ daśāyudhasamanvitam* ||114|| *gajāśvādisamārūḍhaṃ ghorarūpaṃ mahāravaiḥ* | *yatheṣṭakāṣṭhabhāgaṃ vā viśeṣākhyam abhāgakam* ||115|| *kārayec chīghrayānam ca nānābhaktajanais saha* | *mṛgādīnām vadhārthāya ghorarūpaṃ bhayāvaham* ||116|| *tasmin vai mṛgayāne tu mṛgā vā yadi vā narāḥ* | *hatās cet prāṇinaḥ sarve śivasāyujyam āpnuyuh* ||117||—“During the Festival of Dance one should conduct the hunting, or during hunting there should be the Festival of Dance as well (112ab). The best knower of sacred precepts should decide alternatively about these two according to wish (112). Having tied a protective thread on the idol seated in *sukhāsana* etc., especially Tripurāntaka, according to the previously mentioned rule, one should also prepare a double image in a special way, equipped with all ornaments, provided with ten weapons, mounted upon an elephant, a horse etc. with loud voices, possessing a ferocious form, consisting of 8 required parts of a peculiar name, or without those parts (114ab). One should make [the deity] of a frightful appearance which brings fear move rapidly, in company of various devotees and people for the sake of killing animals etc. (116) If during the course of hunting animals or people are killed, all living beings will attain the state of being identical with Śiva (117).”

	PādS, <i>cp</i> , 11.196cd–201	PārS 17.352cd–361	ViśS 18.129–134	MārKS 22.57– 66ab	PurS 24.174cd–181	AnS 21.51–54
appropriate time	between the ceremony of water-bucket (<i>jaladroṇī</i>) and bath (<i>tīrtha</i>)	<i>mahotsava</i> ’s 8 th day	between the ceremony of water-bucket (<i>jaladroṇī</i>) and bath (<i>tīrtha</i>); <i>mahotsava</i> ’s 8 th day	<i>mahotsava</i> ’s 8 th day	<i>mahotsava</i> ’s 8 th day	between a water-play (<i>jalakṛīḍā</i>) and a bath (<i>tīrthādhi-vāsana</i>); <i>mahotsava</i> ’s 8 th day
goddesses	Śrī and Bhūmi	Śrī/Lakṣmī and Dharaṇī/Bhūmi	2 goddesses (presumably Śrī and Bhūmi)	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
vehicle	horse/elephant	gem among horses (<i>aśvaratna</i>)/elephant		horse	gem among horses (<i>aśvaratna</i>)	horse
route	village– <i>maṇḍapa</i> in a garden–temple	village– <i>maṇḍapa</i> in a garden outside a village–village–temple	not mentioned	new garden–temple–forest–village–temple	great forest–village–temple	not mentioned
hunting	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	killing demons in disguise	capturing ferocious animals to release them in front of the god; shooting 5 arrows	not mentioned

Viṣṇu’s hunt on the occasion of *vīralakṣmyutsava*

The accounts of the *vīralakṣmyutsava* (the Hero-Lakṣmī Festival) which involves or hints at a ritual hunting belong to a few of the late *saṃhitās*: the *Īśvarasaṃhitā*, *Puruṣottamasāṃhitā* and the *Paramapurusaṃhitā* (ParpS).³⁶ The *vīralakṣmyutsava* is scheduled for the day following

³⁶ The concept may be also alluded to in the *Śrīpraśnasāṃhitā* (ŚrīprS), where within the passage concerning the *vīralakṣmyutsava*, the ŚrīprS 48.59–60 mentions celebrations of the *vijayadaśamī* involving the festival of a horse-carriage/ascending upon a horse (*turagārohaṇotsava*).

the nine-day³⁷ long celebrations (*navāhotsava*) which fall on the bright part of the month of Āśvayuja (September–October) (ĪS 13.91, ŚrīprS 48.48, PurS 27.22, ParpS 9.51b). Hence, it is also referred to as ‘the tenth day’ (*daśamī*). Whereas the nine-day long festivities correspond to the *navarātri/mahānavamī* festival, which has its background in the myth of Durgā fighting the demon Mahiṣāsura, the *daśamī* is linked to the goddess’s victory upon him, and known alternatively as *vijayadaśamī*. As Madeleine Biarreau notes, it is also always on this day when the worship of a *śamī* tree is observed (Biarreau 1984: 6).

The earliest historical accounts of *mahānavamī* celebrations carried in a way which most likely became a paradigm for South Indian traditions come from the Vijayanagara period and depict the kings honouring the goddess’s victory for ensuring success in battle (Dallapiccola 2013: 278). This was when “[t]he cult of a warrior-goddess who blessed the symbols of kingship—the throne, the sword, the crown, the army etc.—and sanctioned the king’s authority to reign for another year, replaced the older and most elaborate Vedic rituals celebrating individual kings” (Dallapiccola 2013: 279). Meaningful in this context is the date of *mahānavamī*: after the autumnal months of monsoon during which war operations halt, comes the *vijayadaśamī* that marks the beginning of warlike expeditions. The aim of *śamīpūjā*, which is performed exactly on this day, is to purify rusty weapons (Biarreau 1984: 6).

These are only later Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās* which spare some space for the characteristics of Hero-Lakṣmī (Vīralakṣmī) to whom the Pāñcarātrika version of the *mahānavamī* festival is dedicated. To various extents they seem to highlight her relatively independent and warlike nature. She is mentioned along with Yogalakṣmī and Bhogalakṣmī in the PādS, *cp*, 21.76,³⁸ according to which, whereas

³⁷ In the ĪS’s view, the festival can last for nine, seven, five, three or one day, depending on a sectarian affiliation and expected aims (ĪS 13.94), with a Vaiṣṇava variation taking nine days (*navāhotsava*), (ĪS13.95) and bringing *bhukti* and *mukti* (ĪS 13.97cd).

³⁸ PādS 21.76: *yogalakṣmīs tu śrīvatsaṃ bhogalakṣmūr dvipārśvayoḥ | vīralakṣmīs tu vai śeṣaṃ prthag bhavanakalpanam ||76||*

Yogalakṣmī should be worshipped in the Śrīvatsa and Bhogalakṣmī as residing on both sides of the Lord, that means both of them should be worshipped as inseparably bounded to Viṣṇu, Vīralakṣmī deserves a separate site. However, according to the editor, this particular passage does not occur in all manuscripts. Furthermore, the PādS is silent about the *vīralakṣmyutsava*, which may suggest that its celebrations were integrated into the festival programme of Pāñcarātra later. The ĪS, which discusses the festival in some detail, retells the PādS verses saying additionally that besides Śrī and Bhūmī, Vīralakṣmī is one of three consorts of Viṣṇu, all of them collectively perceived as a trinity (*rūpatraya*) (ĪS 7.4–9).³⁹ Elsewhere the ĪS calls her “she who grants all wishes” (*sarvābhīṣṭapradāyini*) (ĪS 7.61). The marital character of Hero-Lakṣmī is particularly emphasized in the MārKS 8.14, according to which she brings pleasure to the king and kingdom (*rājarāṣṭrasukhāvahā*).⁴⁰ Moreover, in the view of ŚrīprS 29.153–160, Vīralakṣmī belongs to the eight aspects of Lakṣmī, all of them apparently

³⁹ ĪS 7.4–9: *śṛṇudhvaṃ munayas sarve śrībhūdevyarcanaṃ param | yena vijñātamātreṇa vāñchitān labhate naraḥ ||4|| bhokṛtsaktiḥ smṛtā lakṣmīḥ puṣṭir vai kartṛsaṃjñitā | bhogārtham avatīrṇasya tasya lokānukampayā ||5|| uditam saha tenai-va śaktidvitayam avyayam | nānātvena hi vai yasya parīṇāmaḥ prakāśitaḥ ||6|| tatra śrīyādidevinām rūpatrayam udāhṛtam | śrīvatsagā yogalakṣmīr bhogalakṣmīs tu pārśvagā ||7|| vīralakṣmīḥ prthaksthāne svātantryeṇa pratiṣṭhitā | evam anyāsu devīṣu rūpatrayam udāhṛtam ||8|| yogalakṣmībhogalakṣmyor devena saha pūjanam | vīralakṣmīḥ prthag gehe pūjayeta yathāvidhi ||9||*—“Listen, all sages!, about the highest worship of the goddesses Śrī and Bhū, by the mere knowledge of which a man attains his desires (4). Lakṣmī is remembered as the potency of the Enjoyer, Puṣṭi, indeed, is known as the Agent (5ab). For the enjoyment of the one who descended due to the compassion to the world, these two imperishable potencies are proclaimed along with him (6ab). Where his evolution is manifested due to manifoldness, there the trinity of forms of Śrī and other goddesses is declared: Yogalakṣmī abides in Śrīvatsa, Bhogalakṣmī in [his] side, Vīralakṣmī, due to her independence, is in a separate place (8ab). In this way as for these other goddesses the trinity of forms is declared (8cd). The worship of Yogalakṣmī and Bhogalakṣmī is with god. Vīralakṣmī should be worshipped in a separate shrine according to the rule (9).”

⁴⁰ In the context of rituals of installation MārKS 8.17–18 mentions Yogalakṣmī, Bhogalakṣmī and Vīralakṣmī in a way known from the PādS.

displaying some associations with the kingship, including Mahālakṣmī, Dhanalakṣmī, Sāṃtanalakṣmī, Jayalakṣmī, Dhānyalakṣmī, Dhairyalakṣmī and Rājyalakṣmī.⁴¹ She assumes a reddish colour and holds a sword and a shield (*vīralakṣmīm pāṭalābhām khadgakeṭadharām smaret*) (ŚrīprS 29.154). The goddess is also associated with the south-western direction (*nairṛta*) (ŚrīprS 15.15), which has demonic connotations. It is known that the royal facets of Śrī-Lakṣmī, that is of a goddess being a product of gradual merging of Śrī and Lakṣmī already from the times of Upaniṣads, can be traced from much earlier. The earliest evidence of their worship is *Śrīsūkta*, where both of them are connected to fertility and wealth. The relation between the substantive *śrī-* in the sense of prosperity and “ruling power, dominion, chieftancy” appears in the Brāhmanic corpus. In the *Baudhayanagr̥hyaśaśasūtra* 1.23 Śrī is worshipped during the coronation of the king (*rājābhiṣeka*) (Gonda 1969; 188ff, cf. Rastelli 2015). Due to her close relation to Viṣṇu, noticed in late portions of the *Māhābhārata*, the goddess was integrated into the theological and ritual system of Vaiṣṇava religious traditions, including Pāñcarātra and Śrīvaiṣṇava. Whereas Śrī-Lakṣmī gained a pivotal role in the teachings of *Lakṣmītantra*, the methods of her incorporation, possibly for royal purposes, are observed, for example, in the *Ahīrbudhnyasaṃhitā* (13th cent.), which is a text focused upon Sudarśana, an embodiment of Viṣṇu’s weapon associated with kings. However, the strategies of Mahālakṣmī’s integration into the textual framework of the AhS reveal some unwillingness to ascribe an independent position to the goddess (Rastelli 2015). As shown by Hüsken, a similar tendency to reluctantly accept the goddess is seen in the way of celebrating the nine-day-long festival dedicated to Vīralakṣmī. Both in the case of Pāñcarātrika normative texts and contemporary practice she recedes before the *viṣṇuyadaśamī* starts and gives up the ritual scene to the Lord regardless of her military features that would be attractive for the royal spheres (Hüsken 2018: 184).

⁴¹ On the modern development of Aṣṭalakṣmī worship, see Narayanan 1998: 104–105.

In the case of Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*, close links of *mahānavamī* with royalty are expressed especially clearly in the prescriptions of the *Paramapuruṣasaṃhitā* (ParpS), which states that on the day following its nine-day-long celebrations the “sprinkling of a turban by a king” (*rājñāpaṭṭābhīṣeka*) connotating the king’s coronation, should take place (ParpS 9.65).⁴² On the ninth day (*navamī*) of a bright fortnight of the month of Āśvina there falls the annual great celebration of Vīralakṣmī (*mahotsava*) (ParpS 9.52ab–53ab: *āśvinasya site pakṣe navamyām tu mahotsavam | vīralakṣmyās tu kartavyam pratyabdam ca dharātale*). This is the best of all festivals, performed for the pleasure of the goddess (ParS 9.54ab: *tasmāt tasyās tu samprītyai kartavyam idam utsavam*), who is the Mother of the World in a human form (ParS 9.53d: *jaganmātā puruṣākārārūpiṇī*). The goddess’s celebrations should be held either in the temple (*devāgāre*) or at home (*grhe*) (ParS 9.55). ParpS 9.59cd–61ab continues that on the ninth day Śrī should be worshipped in fire, jar, and *maṇḍala* and after that installed in the image (*bimba*). The purpose of goddess’ celebration is to increase good fortune (*saubhāgyasamṛddhi*) to all in the country. On the *daśamī*, however, she loses her position for the texts speak about the male god’s festival of victory (*devasya vijayotsavam*) (ParpS 9.61cd–62ab). In some circumstances, a day before *vijayotsava*, it is recommended to worship Mahālakṣmī’s horse, and on the following day, *daśamī*, to worship weapons (ParpS 9.70–71). These two elements, that is the worship of a kingly mount and the worship of weapons are possibly the reason why Smith equates the ParpS *vijayotsava* with the hunting festival (Smith 1982: 48, fn 17).

⁴² In the passage dealing with the king’s duties, the late AnS mentions public displaying of a turban (*paṭṭabandha*); *anyeṣām prāṇisarvebhyaḥ paṭṭabandham prakāśayet* (AnS 10.6a). The 9th and 10th cent. grants from Deccan refer to the conferral of this type of a headband as a crucial event of court assemblies, the so-called *paṭṭabandhamahotsava* / *paṭṭabandhābhīṣeka*, which was a kind of royal coronation, implicating gifts of land etc. (Ali 2006: 118–119).

In the PurS too, this is the god who plays a central role on the tenth day of celebrations, although on the previous nine days it is him along with the goddess, who is worshipped. On the *daśamī* Viṣṇu rides a horse around the village, to the unspecified place where a bow and arrow are placed under a *śamī* tree. Releasing only one arrow may suggest that in this case less attention is given to metaphorical subjugation of the world. Instead, PurS focuses upon substituting the activity of killing the demon. The practice unnoticed in the ĪS description is that the tree's leaves are collected by the devotees for the sake of purification of their sins (PurS 27.22–30):

Then, in the month of Āśvayuja, one should perform *vīralakṣmyutsava*. One should perform a nine-day-long festival starting on the first day of a lunar fortnight. After performing a bath with jars constantly adorning [the god present at] four places, ending with an oblation in fire (*havis*),⁴³ and honouring [him], a teacher should mount the goddess on a carriage. Every day he should take the god [with her?] to circumambulate a village. On the ninth day, he should sprinkle [them?] with water from jars. At the end of the regular worship he should worship the goddess along with the god. On the tenth day, having mounted the god on a horse, he should take him to circumambulate the village. Having approached a *śamī* tree, he should put the carriage at its roots. Having worshipped Viṣvaksena, one should declare the day auspicious. Having sprinkled a bow and arrow with water sanctified by the formula of wishing auspicious day, one should worship [them]. Having released an arrow firstly, one should worship the god. Having gathered the *śamī*-leaves, one should worship [them] at the god's feet. Those people who put on a head the *śamī*-leaves [which were] placed at the foot of god, their sins will be certainly annihilated. Then, in splendour, one should carry the god to the god's abode.⁴⁴

⁴³ These places are: *maṇḍala*, jar (*kumbha*), idol (*arcā*, *pratimā*, *bimba*), and fire (*agni*). See TAK vol 2: 227.

⁴⁴ PurS 27.22–30: *atha cāśvayuje māsi vīralakṣmyutsavam caret | pratipad-dinam ārabhya navāhotsavam ācaret ||22|| saṁsnāpya kalaśair nityam alaṅkṛtya tu*

Other *saṃhitās*, too, prescribe elaborate worship of Vīralakṣmī for nine days which precede *vijayadaśamī* (ĪS 13.101–11; cf. ŚrīprS 48.49–50). As Hüsken has shown, this practice is only partially followed nowadays, at least in the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram, which treats the ĪS as a normative base. For instance, whereas the texts teach parading the goddess through the village every evening, currently she goes out up to the boundary of the temple complex along with her husband, Varadarāja. Hüsken links this change with the status of Lakṣmī as an “exemplary chaste and subdued Brahmin wife, who never leaves the house (i.e. temple compound)” (Hüsken 2018: 181).

Being related to a Vaiṣṇava version of *mahānavamī* celebrations which primarily focus on praising royal power, a *mṛgayotsava* carried on this occasion is informed with even more elements evoking its kingly character than in the case of *mahotsava*.⁴⁵ As the ĪS 13.127 openly states, it is held for the sake of the growth of the kingdom (*rāṣṭrābhivṛddhida*). However, as mentioned above, the Hero-Lakṣmī has no agency during the hunt excursion for she stays in the temple. This is Viṣṇu who on his

deśikaḥ | catuṣṭhānārcanam kṛtvā havirantaṃ prapūjya ca ||23|| yāne devīm samāropya devaṃ grāmapradakṣiṇam | evaṃ pratidinaṃ kṛtvā navamyām kumbhatoyataḥ ||24|| prokṣayen nityapūjānte devīm devena pūjayet | daśamyām aśvam āropya devaṃ grāmapradakṣiṇam ||25|| nītva śamīm samāsādyā tanmūle sthāpya yānakam | viśvakṣenaṃ tu sampūjya puṇyāhaṃ vācayet tataḥ ||26|| prokṣya puṇyāhatoyena dhanurbhānu prapūjayet | pūrvavad vāṇamokṣaṃ tu kṛtvā devaṃ ca pūjayet ||27|| śamīpatrāṇi saṅgrhya pūjayed devapādayoḥ | devasya padavinyastaśamīpatrāṇi ye narāḥ ||28|| śirasā dhārayiṣyanti te dhruvaṃ muktakilviṣāḥ | vaibhavana tato devaṃ nayed devālayaṃ prati ||29||

⁴⁵ As Hüsken writes: “While the Varadarāja temple’s Navarātri festival emphasizes the goddess in her calm, beautiful, and perfectly subdued form, in text and performance, we see a strong focus on those aspects that reconfirm and celebrate royal power—indicating that this festival in the Pāñcarātra tradition was primarily aimed at royal clients of the priests. These royal aspects are the courts of Varadarāja and Lakṣmī, the recitation of specific verses in Tamil (*pattiyēṇṇam*) in honor of the god-king’s deeds, the hunting excursion of the male god outside the temple compound to the *vaṇṇi* tree, his shooting of arrows in the direction of the enemies, and the display of wealth on the bodies of the attending women” (Hüsken 2018: 186–187).

mount goes to a great forest (*mahāvana*) to symbolically overcome an enemy. The ĪS 13.127–146 recommends:

On the following day, [i.e.] the tenth, one should conduct the god's hunting festival (*mṛgayotsava*) in accordance with the rule which will be said hereafter, for the sake of the growth of the kingdom (127). On the ninth day, one should carry a horse of god, adorned particularly, the bunch of arrows, god's bow etc. as well, to a river's or a pond's bank (129ab). Having brought [them], having bathed the horse and weapons etc., having adorned [the horse] particularly with garlands and cloths etc., an umbrella, banner-cloth etc., having carried it around the village with dance and instrumental music, one should make the horse of the god enter the abode (131ab). There, the knower of mantra, having worshipped it with the *tārṣya-mantra* [Garuḍa-mantra], he should worship it beginning with *arghya*-offering, perfumes etc., up to the offering of an oblation in fire (*havis*) (132ab). The teacher should also worship the weapons, each of them with its *mantra* (132cd). On the tenth day having performed the regular worship (*pūjā*) of the God of Gods, he should at first carry the god in his festival image to the *āsthānamaṇḍapa* (133). Having bathed the god there with twenty-five jars, one should worship [him] in the place of decoration and offer a great oblation in fire (*mahāhavis*) (134). Having mounted the god on a horse, then, one should adorn him with ornaments suitable for hunting, along with paraphernalia fit for journey (135). One should lead him in accompany of *vaiṣṇava* devotees and soldiers armed with weapons to the great forest, where he should offer to the God of Gods roots and fruits etc. delivered with *bhakti* especially by ascetics and others who dwell in the forest, and various flowery garlands (137). Having brought him in the vicinity of a *vahni* tree, one should perform the circumambulation, place him there at the place for supplying water or other (*prapādike*), on the splendid throne at the roots of a *vahni* tree, and honour the weapons beginning with [the formula of] wishing the auspicious day (139). Having taken a leaf of a *śamī* tree with *mūlamantra*, having put [it] on the god's head, and having honoured [him] with *arghya* etc., the teacher should offer him betel and, thus, with a permission, having seized a bow with arrows for the sake of conquering all directions, destroying all enemies and for

prosperity of king's kingdom, he should direct four arrows in for directions and two arrows up and down, with *astramantra* and *ṛc*-hymn *dhanavanā gā* (143ab). Then he should worship the God of Gods with various offerings (143cd). When evening comes, having mounted the Lord of World on a horse, with hundreds of lights and with accompaniment of [the sound of] various musical instruments, he should lead him inside the temple having circumambulated the village (145ab). Having bathed the God of Gods with nine jars and adorned him, the teacher should honour the Omnipresent one along with Śrī and Puṣṭi with an oblation in fire (*havis*) at the end (146ab). In this way the praised festival (*utsava*) should be performed on the tenth day (146cd).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ ĪS 13.127–146: *tadanyedyur daśamyām tu devasya mṛgayotsavam | vakṣyamāṇena vidhinā kuryād rāṣṭrābhivṛddhidam ||127|| navamyām eva devasya tura-*
gaṃ ca viśeṣataḥ | alaṅkṛtaṃ tathāstraughaṃ devasya dhanurādikam ||128|| vāhayamṣ
tu nadītūraṃ sarastīraṃ athāpi vā | samānīyātha saṃsnāpya turagaṃ cāyudhādika-
kaṃ ||129|| alaṅkṛtya viśeṣeṇa mālyair vastrādikais tathā | chatradhvajapatākādyair
nṛttavādyaravaiḥ saha ||130|| grāmapradakṣiṇaṃ nītvā ālayaṃ sampraveśayet | tatra
devasya turagaṃ tārkṣyamantreṇa mantravit ||131|| samabhyarcyārghyagandhādy-
air havirantaṃ samarcayet | āyudhāny arcayet tadvat tattanmantreṇa deśikāḥ ||132||
daśamyām devadevasya kṛtvā nityārcaṇaṃ purā | yātrāmūrtigataṃ devaṃ nayed
āsthānamaṇṭapam ||133|| taṃ devaṃ tatra saṃsnāpya pañcaviṃśatibhir ghaṭaiḥ |
alaṅkārasane 'bhyarcya nivedya ca mahāhaviḥ ||134|| devaṃ aśve samāropya tatas
tu mṛgayocitaiḥ | alaṅkārair alaṅkṛtya yātropakaraṇaiḥ saha ||135|| bhaktair bhāg-
avataiḥ sārddhaṃ sannaddhaiḥ sāyudhair bhaṭaiḥ | mahāvānaṃ samānīya tatra tatra
viśeṣataḥ ||136|| vānaprasthais tāpasādyair arpitāni ca bhaktitaḥ | kandaṃlaphalādī-
ni vividhāḥ kusumasrajaḥ ||137|| samarpya devadevāya vahnivṛkṣasamīpataḥ | nītvā
pradakṣiṇīkṛtya devaṃ tatra prapādike ||138|| bhadrasane samāveśya vahnivṛkṣasya
mūlataḥ | āyudhāni samabhyarcya puṇyāhoktipurassaram ||139|| śamīpatraṃ tu
saṅgrhya mūlamantreṇa deśikāḥ | datvā devasya śirasi arghyādyaiḥ samprapūjya
ca ||140|| tāmbūlaṃ vinivedyātha deśikas tadanujñayā | dhanurbāñān samādāya sar-
vadigvijayāya ca ||141|| sarvaśatruvināśāya rājarāṣṭrābhivṛddhaye | caturdikṣu catur-
bāñān ūrdhve 'dhaś ca saradvayam ||142|| prayuñjed astramantrēṇa dhanvanāgeṭi vā
ṛcā | tato 'rcayed devadevaṃ vividhair upahārakaiḥ ||143|| sāyāṅkāle tu samprāpte
āropyaśve jagatprabhum | pradīpaśatasamyuktaṃ nānāvādyasamanvitam ||144||
grāmapradakṣiṇaṃ devaṃ mandirāntaḥ praveśayet | deveśaṃ navabhiḥ kumbhaiḥ
snāpyālaṃkṛtya deśikāḥ ||145|| śrīpuṣṭibhyāṃ saha vibhuṃ havirantaṃ samarcayet |
evaṃ daśamyām kartavyam utsavaṃ ca prakīrtitam ||146||

As the text states, by the means of shooting the arrows nearby the *śamī* tree the priest, on behalf of the god, subdues the world, kills the enemies and thus ensures the prosperity of the kingdom (ĪS 13.142). However, the vicinity of the *śamī* tree adds a significant dimension to the ceremony. Being associated with the *Mahābhārata*'s episode of the Pāṇḍavas hiding their weapons under it, it reveals a wide range of links with the killing of an enemy. In the context of *vijayaśamī* celebrations, an enemy equals the demon. This relation is clearly expressed in the Tamil language, in which the element of destruction of a demon is known as *vaṇṇimaram pārivēṭṭai* (vanni tree hunting festival) (Hüsken 2018: 184). Hence, apart from the reenactment of subjugation of the whole earth, in the Vaiṣṇava context discharging the arrows in all directions nearby the *śamī* tree first of all seems to substitute for the episode which provides the festival with a mythological background, even though this is the male god who does it instead of the goddess. The same pattern is observed in a current practice of the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram. In comparison to the festivities held on the same occasion in the local Śākta Kāmākṣī temple, where the goddess herself slays the demon, the Vaiṣṇava way of feasting appears rather passive and docile, with Varadarāja, who, embodied by the priest, shoots the arrows on behalf of Lakṣmī (Hüsken 2018: 184).

Noteworthy, the prescriptions of the ĪS are retold, and sometimes even reproduced, by the editor(s) of the ŚrīprS. According to V. Raghavan, both texts are roughly contemporary but the latter seems slightly later (Raghavan 1969) and draws extensively both from the PādS and the ĪS. However, ŚrīprS 43.1–23 determines the timing of *mṛgayotsava* for the tenth day of the bright part of the month of Nabhasya (the rainy season, August–September), which points to its independent status. Also, differently than in other *saṃitās*, here the aim of the god's hunt is meant to provide ascetics and others who dwell in the forest (*vanaprasthā tāpasādi*), and hence stay beyond the boundaries of an organized society, with the opportunity to meet the Lord otherwise unavailable to them (cf. Smith 1982, Orr 2004).

Viṣṇu, attended by devotees and servants, sets off on his journey to a great forest without his consorts, where rituals concerning a *vahni/śamī* tree are involved (parallel passages in Hüsken 2018). Conceptualizing the *mṛgayotsava* as the occasion on which ascetics and others may have a look at the deity may have its roots in the ĪS 13.137, where their attendance at the hunting procession performed on the occasion of *vīralakṣmyutsava* was briefly hinted at by the means of similar expressions.⁴⁷

Table 2. Important elements of *mṛgayotsava/mṛgayātrā* taught by the *saṃhitās* in relation to *vīralakṣmyutsava*

	ĪS 13.127–146	PurS 27.22–30	ParpS 9.61–71
goddesses	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
vehicle	horse	horse	horse
route	<i>āsthānamaṇḍapa</i> – great forest– <i>vahni</i> tree–village–temple	not mentioned	not mentioned
hunting	shooting arrows in the vicinity of a <i>vahni</i> tree	shooting arrows in the vicinity of a <i>vahni</i> tree	worship of a horse/ worship of weapons

⁴⁷ Comp. ĪS 13.137–138ab: *vānaprasthais tāpasādyair arpitāni ca bhaktiṭaḥ | kandaṃūlaphalādīni vividhāḥ kusumasrajaḥ ||137|| samarpya devadevāya vahni-vṛkṣasamīpataḥ | nītvā pradakṣiṇīkr̥tya devaṃ tatra prapādike ||138|| bhadṛāsane samāveśya vahnivṛkṣasya mūlataḥ | āyudhāni samabhyarcya puṇyāhoktipurassaram* with: ŚrīprS 43.12–14: *tatra dhyānaparair nityaṃ vānaprasthaiḥ samarpitam ||12|| kandaṃūlaphalaṃ cānyad gurur deve nivedayet | kārayitvā tu mṛgayāṃ vahni-vṛkṣasamīpataḥ ||13|| nītvā prapādike rāmye sthāpayitvā jagatpatim | vahnivṛkṣasya mūle tu prokṣya puṇyāhavarīṇā ||14||* and: ŚrīprS 43.18–19ab: *vānaprasthais tāpasādyair arpitāni ca bhaktiṭaḥ | kandaṃūlaphalādīni vividhāḥ kusumasrajaḥ ||18|| samarpya devadevāya tāmbūlaṃ ca nivedayet |*

Table 3. Important elements of *mṛgayotsava*/*mṛgayātrā* taught by the *saṃhitās* on the occasion different than *mahotsava* and *vīralakṣmyutsava*

	ĪS 13.251cd–263ab	ŚrīprS 43.1–23
occasion	A day after the <i>makara-saṃkrānti</i>	10 th day of the bright part of the month of Nabhasya
goddesses	not mentioned	not mentioned
vehicle	gem among horses	horse
route	each and every forest (<i>vane vane</i>)–village–temple	great forest– <i>vahni</i> tree–circumabulation through all paths–boundary of the village–temple
hunting	capturing a boar, an elephant, a tiger, a black and spotted antelope to be released in front of God	shooting arrows in the vicinity of a <i>vahni</i> tree

Conclusions

The treatment of a hunt festival in the Pāñcarātra sources may seem extremely variegated, yet, in fact, the range of activities which, in a certain sequence, are taught by a given *saṃhitā* is relatively limited, with a number of borrowings and retellings among individual texts. A prescriptive model, even if not unified, seems actually much less complicated than the range of variations observed in contemporary practice of South Indian temples, the latter suggesting that the ritual hunt's original function and meaning has been often deeply modified (L'Hernault, Reiniche 1999: 74). In *saṃhitās*, the general pattern of celebrations remains roughly similar: a properly equipped Lord surrounded by devotees acting out a kind of battue rides a royal mount towards a shadowy spot situated beyond the boundary of a temple. Although due to constant reworking, the *saṃhitās*' chronology remains uncertain, one may however notice a sort of expansion of *mṛgayotsava*'s meanings. A hunt excursion during which the deity joined by his two

wives boasts his kingly splendour on the way to the shades of a garden appears to dominate, if not to exclusively occupy, the earlier descriptions (PādS, PārS, ViśS). A distinct form which focuses upon a single male god's expedition to a forest, where some sort of hunting involving symbolical killing is performed, appears in MārKs and PurS. A particularly meaningful change is however noticed in the accounts which prescribe a trip to a forest, again of Viṣṇu alone, where a *vahni/śamī* tree grows (ĪS, PurS, ParpS). This is only in the vicinity of a this tree, where worship of weapons and shooting arrows on behalf of a god gains a special meaning of victory over an enemy/demon. An element which significantly influences the festival's structure and function is therefore crossing a boundary of an inhabited space, marked by entering a forest, as it both makes the presence of goddesses impossible and extends the territory delineated by procession. Thus, whereas a trip to a garden in the company of wives seems to be bound to *mahotsava*, with its splendid processions carried rather within a village (with exceptions which, nonetheless, as we can presume, treat a garden as a part of a domesticated space), the model involving a visit to a forest might have been a later development which entered (and complemented) the scene along with a growing need to appeal to royal circles. For this sake Viṣṇu's warlike features and his sovereignty over particular area had to be stressed. This seems especially evident in the case of *mṛgayotsava* performed on the occasion of *vīralakṣmyutsava*, as a part of autumnal *mahānavamī*, celebrated in South India with a grand pomp from the times of Vijayanagara kings. Contrary to the accounts of *mahotsava*-related *mṛgayotsava*, which treats hunting as a sport, performed in a garden to which Viṣṇu along with his wives travels for pleasure and as such evokes the model of a king who "fructifies and enjoys" his realm (Ali 2003: 224), the occasion of *vīralakṣmyutsava/vijayadaśamī* strongly situates Viṣṇu within the symbolical context of a victorious king who by means of replacing Vīralakṣmī in killing the demon symbolized by a *śamī* tree overcomes his enemies. While on the move, he also enhances his power upon his territory, the event additionally reenacted by shooting arrows in all directions.

An increasing tendency to communicate the Lord's relation to the realm he dwells in and his acceptance of various communities under his spiritual/kingly rule, which in Orr's opinion is reflected in significant extension of procession territory, is particularly seen in the passages dealing with the god who inspects each and every forest (ĪS 13. 251cd–263ab) or visits forest dwellers (ŚrīprS) on occasions other than *mahotsava* or *vīralakṣmyutsava*. This perhaps means that the accounts of hunting celebrations held in dissasociation from *mahotsava/vīralakṣmyutsava* present the latest addition to the Pāñcarātra's vision of *mṛgayotsava*.

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